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Office of University Communications

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“The Coed’s Mite” is Set in Cleveland County During the 1930s and Focuses on Romance, Struggles and Faith

BOILING SPRINGS, NC – Gardner-Webb University alumnus and retired faculty member Lansford Jolley’s new book, “The Coed’s Mite,” may be fiction, but it’s apparent that parts of the story, including characters, locations, and plotlines are based on reality and even some GWU history. Jolley, a native of Boiling Springs, N.C., served as the University’s chair of the Department of Social Sciences for 33 years, where he taught history, sociology, and marriage and family, before retiring in 1992. Aspects of his new book bring historical moments of Gardner-Webb to life through the lives of main characters, Thomas and Ann.

“The Coed’s Mite” highlights the relationship between, Thomas Smith and Ann Forbes, who meet on a small Baptist college campus, in the small town of Springmore, N.C., during the Great Depression in the early 1930s. Ann comes from an influential family living in a city, while Thomas comes from more challenging circumstances – living in the mountains with a family dependent on farming. Thomas is studying to become a preacher, which becomes an integral part of the book’s storyline regarding ministry and service to those less fortunate.

“‘Mite’ is used in the book’s title as a reference to the widow in the Bible that had little, but gave all she had,” said Jolley. Her offering of two mites—coins—only amounted to a fraction of a penny. “In that scripture many people gave a lot to the offering, but Jesus was touched because she gave all.” Jolley said that concept becomes a central theme in the story he weaves.

Thomas and Ann meet for the first time when he rescues her from a campus dorm fire. True to actual Gardner-Webb history, there were two fires to buildings on campus in 1937 and 1957, which caused students to evacuate from their dorms. Another part of the book features a prank involving a cow on the loose inside the girls’ dormitory. According to Jolley, this too, was based on an actual event at GWU. The college, a church, a country store, and a drug store are all establishments in Springmore, N.C., and are reminiscent of actual locations in the community.

The story goes on to tell how Thomas’ ministry takes on new meaning after he’s invited to preach at churches in the community, including one named Mount Pleasant Baptist.

Thomas is considered an outstanding preacher and many in the community begin to rely on him and Ann. “The Coed’s Mite” also includes struggles during the Great Depression. This

difficult time gives Thomas and Ann a chance to minister to the people and invite them to church. Jolley is too young to remember the Great Depression, but said his research confirmed that “the characters in this book are much more poverty stricken.”

To find out the full story of Thomas and Ann and what becomes of them after numerous challenges, Jolley hopes people in the community will pick up a copy of his book and enjoy reading it. Currently, the book is for sale in the GWU Campus Shop, located in the Tucker Student Center.

Jolley was also responsible for writing, “Dreaming, Daring, Doing: The Story of Gardner-Webb University” (released 1997) and “Visions of Faith: The Centennial of the Kings Mountain Baptist Association (1851-2001),” a work that received a North Carolina Society of Historians Award.